

In this Christmas season, in this Hanukkah season, on the edge of Ramadan, this is a time for mercy and vision and looking at all of our children together. You have reaffirmed the fact that you now intend to share this piece of land without war, with your neighbors, forever. They have heard you. They have heard you.

Now, you and they must now determine what kind of peace you will have. Will it be grudging and mean-spirited and confining, or will it be generous and open? Will you begin to judge each other in the way you would like to be judged? Will you begin to see each other's children in the way you see your own? Will they feel your pain, and will you understand theirs?

Surely to goodness, after 5 years of this peace process and decades of suffering and after you have come here today and done what you have done, we can say, "Enough of this gnashing of teeth. Let us join hands and proudly go forward together."

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:30 p.m. in the Main Hall at the Shawwa Center. In his remarks, he referred to Speaker Salim Za'anoun of the Palestine National Council; and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority, and his wife Shua.

### **Statement on the Puerto Rico Status Referendum**

*December 14, 1998*

I have advocated enabling the people of Puerto Rico to determine their future status among all the options—continuing the current governing arrangement, known as Commonwealth; nationhood, either independent from or in an association with the U.S.; and statehood. This year the House passed a bipartisan bill for this purpose, with my support, but the Senate majority leadership blocked it. In the end, the leadership simply recognized Puerto Ricans' right to choose and promised to review the results.

Yesterday Puerto Ricans voted on these issues under local law. A majority of the vote was not for any of the options. Among the rest, the overwhelming majority supported statehood.

I will, therefore, work with Members of Congress and the people of Puerto Rico and their leaders to enable Puerto Ricans to clarify their choice among the options. I remain committed to implementing a majority choice for Puerto Rico's future status.

### **Remarks Following Trilateral Discussions and an Exchange With Reporters at Erez Crossing, Israel**

*December 15, 1998*

Good morning, everybody. I just had a very good meeting, a very frank meeting, with Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat. First, everyone agrees that yesterday's convening of all the Palestinian groups and the vote by the Palestinian National Council and the others to fully and forever reject the conflict with Israel and commit to a path to peace and cooperation was a truly historic day.

And what we focused on in our meeting is how to follow up on that, where do we go from here, how can we vigorously implement the process that we agreed to at Wye. And I'd like to just—I have a few notes here from the meeting—I'd like to go over them with you.

The first thing that we agreed to do was to energize the permanent status talks. Keep in mind, the purpose of the Wye agreement was to resolve the matters that had to be resolved so we could get into permanent status talks and try to get back as close as possible to the timetable set out in 1993.

Secondly, we agreed to vigorously pursue the security issue through the appropriate committee. There is, I think, no space between the two sides in their understanding that maintaining security cooperation and minimizing security problems is the precondition to making all the rest of this work. It's what made Wye possible.

Thirdly, the prisoner issue, as you know, is a difficult one, but an informal channel has been agreed to for dealing with that, and it was agreed to—referred all the questions to that channel and to pursue that accordingly.

Fourthly, there is a so-called steering committee which is basically a clearinghouse for